

January 12, 1979 (15)

Defense / Space Daily

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SOVIETS WARN U.S. ON RELEASE OF RECONNAISSANCE PHOTOS

Say It Will Affect SALT

During the past week the Soviet Union has warned the United States that any public release of military reconnaissance/surveillance photographs taken of the Soviet Union will affect the relations between the two countries and endanger the on-going SALT negotiations.

In October, President Carter broke precedent and brought the world of photographic reconnaissance/surveillance satellites into the open with the announcement that "photo reconnaissance satellites have become an important stabilizing factor in world affairs" (Defense/Space Daily, Oct. 3).

The Presidential acknowledgment of the use of photo reconnaissance satellites was another Administration move to gain support for the forthcoming SALT II agreement by pointing out that the United States "national means of verification," principally the use of the observer satellites, would ensure that any SALT II agreement with the Soviet Union could be verified "adequately."

Carter added that, "In the monitoring of arms control agreements, they make an immense contribution to the security of all nations. We shall continue to develop them."

The White House went a step further in seeking to convince the public that our reconnaissance satellites were adequate to verify a SALT II agreement. White House press secretary Jody Powell said, "It is important for people to know that we are in a position to verify without relying on the good intentions of the other party."

Other Administration officials have wanted to go still further in convincing the people that SALT II is verifiable with the aid of the photographs taken by the reconnaissance satellites, by releasing photographs of Soviet installations and weapons taken by these satellites.

Reacting to these reports, the Soviets this past week have lodged an objection to such a plan.

Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin informed Secretary of State Cyrus Vance that such a move by the Administration would not be in the best interests of the relations between the two countries. Dobrynin told Vance that such an action would endanger the progress of the on-going SALT II negotiations.

Dobrynin said the Soviet Union would object to the U.S. making public any space photographs taken of the Soviet Union with a resolution greater than 50 meters. Implicit in the Soviet concern is the possible use that could be made of the photographs by other nations with strategic weapons capabilities, specifically France and the Peoples Republic of China. France has long demonstrated an interest in the development of photo reconnaissance capabilities while the PRC are even now engaged in the development and flight testing of such systems.

China's Interest In Space Photos

Reflecting the concern for the sensitivity of the Soviet Union to any disclosure of over-flight photography which an adversary might use for strategic targeting, great consternation ensued in Washington when it was reported last year that NASA's Landsat photographs of the Soviet Union were being sold to an outlet in Hong Kong representing the Peoples Republic of China.

At least one band of the Landsat-3 spacecraft launched in the spring of 1978, the satellite's return beam vidicon camera, has a resolution of 40 meters, which produces photos with a resolution that falls within the area that the Soviet Union wants restricted. While the Landsat photos in no way approach the definition of the military reconnaissance photos, such as those taken by the Air Force/Lockheed Big Bird satellite, a Soviet insistence on restricting the disclosure of photographs of the Soviet Union to those with resolutions over 50 meters could impact on the Landsat program.

While Landsat-3 has only one band which produces images of 40 meters resolution, Landsat-D, scheduled for launch in 1981, will have six bands, out of a total of seven, that will produce images of 30 meters resolution.

Pentagon officials object to any plan for the release of their military reconnaissance photographs for fear that it might aid the Soviet Union in the concealment of its weapons development programs and provide the Soviets with the means of thwarting the U.S. reconnaissance satellite program's capabilities. Cited are the advantages that were handed to the Soviet Union with the loss of the KH-11 surveillance satellite manual, recently stolen by a CIA employee and sold to the Soviet Union.

In light of the Soviet objection, some officials feel the Administration will be reluctant to go ahead with the release of the photos. Others, however, feel the Administration should proceed, rather than supporting the SALT II agreement.

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SIGNATURE _____
APPROVAL _____
COMMENTS _____

COORDINATION _____
ACTION _____
INFORMATION _____

TO:

[Redacted]

RS

SUBJECT:

I've simultaneously sent
3 copies to [Redacted] who
could not locate any copies. Perhaps
the Agency could use a librarian

Bob M

[Redacted]

AM
FYI and file.

[Redacted]

saw it last week when
[Redacted] *brought in his*
copy - His Librarian had
it!

R